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SUBJECT: INDIGENOUS HEARTLAND DIVIDED ON ELECTIONS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The indigenous heartland provinces of Chimborazo and Cotopaxi are predominantly indigenous strongholds of the Pachakutik Movement. Despite Pachakutik's dominance, the indigenous movement is fractured internally over whether to run its own candidate or support Rafael Correa, and also along religious lines. As a result, most consider center-left candidate Leon Roldos to be the current presidential favorite. Rafael Correa in Chimborazo, and Alvaro Noboa in Cotopaxi, appear to be running second. There is also lingering support for deposed ex-president Lucio Gutierrez, in both provinces. End Summary.

Background

¶2. (U) During a visit to the highland provinces of Chimborazo and Cotopaxi on June 19-21 PolOffs met with municipal and provincial officials, the provincial electoral tribunals, political party leaders, and civil society representatives to discuss local views on upcoming national elections in October. In public events PolOffs highlighted USG engagement and the importance of democratic elections.

¶3. (SBU) PolOffs' visit to Cotopaxi province was preceded by several days by Cuban VP Carlos Lage, who had visited with President Palacio, to inaugurate the opening of an ophthalmology clinic where Cuban doctors are currently working. (Another such clinic was opened the same day with Cuban support in populous coastal Guayas province.) Cotopaxi Prefect Umajinga downplayed to PolOffs any potential political role for Cuban technicians in the province, who are invited only to fill yawning social deficits in medicine and to fight illiteracy. The mayor and other mestizo leaders, however, privately expressed concern over Umajinga's links to the Cuba, where he has visited several times.

Provincial Electoral History

¶4. (U) The province of Chimborazo, named after the towering 6,267 m extinct volcano and Ecuador's highest point, has 316,500 registered voters, representing 3.6 percent of the national electorate. Chimborazo is predominantly rural and roughly 70 percent indigenous, with most of the mestizo minority concentrated in the provincial capital of Riobamba. Over 30% of the population is illiterate. Recently evangelical Christianity has gained popularity in the province, creating fissures in the predominantly Catholic indigenous communities. In recent years, the Pachakutik Movement, named after the 15th century Incan ruler Pachakuti, has dominated the province. Significant ethnic divides

remain, however, between indigenous and mestizo leaders, and between Catholic and evangelical protestant indigenous. The evangelicals, represented by the "Amauta" movement, comprise roughly 20% of the indigenous population.

¶5. (U) In 2004, Mariano Curicama Guaman (Pachakutik) was elected Chimborazo's first indigenous prefect (U.S. governor-equivalent) with 31% of the vote, while Angel Ignacio Yanez, a mestizo allied with former president Oswaldo Hurtado, a native son, won the mayorship of Riobamba with 30% (and Pachakutik's backing). Ex-president Lucio Gutierrez received 79% of the vote in the second round of the 2002 presidential elections; also-ran banana magnate Alvaro Noboa (Roldosista Institutional Renewal Party-PRIAN) won just 21%.

¶6. (U) Meanwhile, the smaller (2.9% of the national electorate) province of Cotopaxi, named for the world's highest active volcano, is also predominantly indigenous, with the same rural-urban divide between indigenous and mestizo leaders. Ex-president Lucio Gutierrez captured 79% of the second round presidential vote in 2002, with Alvaro Noboa receiving 21%. In 2004, indigenous Cesar Umajinga Guaman (Pachakutik) won re-election as prefect with 39% of the vote. Mestizo Rafael Enrique Maya (PRIAN) won as mayor of Latacunga with 26% the same year, narrowly defeating the Democratic Left (ID) candidate.

Electoral Preparations Proceeding

¶7. (SBU) Electoral Tribunal President Rocio Solorzano, who hails from the Marxist Popular Democracy Movement (MPD) and other electoral officials downplayed past incidence of electoral fraud in the province. (Note: provincial election officials represent the seven parties with the most votes at the national level. The presidency of the tribunal at the provincial level is also allocated for each province at the national level, with the presidency not normally given to the dominant party in the province. End Note.) Election officials said they were overworked and constrained by the geography and lack of resources. They had yet to receive training from the national Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) in election procedures, and were focusing on getting motivated and responsible people to man the polling stations. In past elections, public sector bosses have assigned duty to unlucky public employees. To remedy this, TSE officials propose to use more local university students for the upcoming election.

¶8. (SBU) Women's groups and independent election monitors told us that women's electoral rights have been curtailed in the past in both provinces. Most attributed this to the high percentage of indigenous in the area, saying indigenous culture is macho and limits the public role of women. Solorzano, the first woman TSE president in Chimborazo, said she would attempt to change this by applying to the letter the law dictating the alternation of men and women candidates on party lists. The law mandates a 45% quota for female candidates. In the past, parties have violated the spirit of the law by listing women as alternates, included spouses of party leaders, and alternated multiple male candidates at the top of the list, followed by an equal amount of women, below the level considered likely to win.

¶9. (SBU) Cotopaxi Electoral Tribunal President Leonardo Segovia (also MPD) told PolOffs that Cotopaxi had no history of electoral fraud and that he was committed to running transparent and fair elections. In contrast with his counterpart in Chimborazo, Segovia was equivocal about applying the male-female alternation law, noting the national electoral tribunal (TSE) had ruled that it was open to interpretation. He seemed certain that ex-President Gutierrez would not be allowed to be a presidential candidate. (Note: The TSE has ruled that Gutierrez violated election law in 2002, stripping him of political rights for two years. Gutierrez has appealed the ruling to the Constitutional Court, which is expected to uphold it. End Note.)

Roldos Leads, But Most Voters Undecided

¶10. (SBU) Despite the strength of Pachakutik in both provinces, our contacts concurred that Leon Roldos currently leads the polls for the 2006 presidential elections in their province, as at the national level. Evangelical indigenous have already joined Roldos in Chimborazo province. With Pachakutik divided over whether to run its own candidate or support Correa, many other indigenous voters could also support Roldos. "Citizen Participation" NGO Chimborazo leader Josefina Campana cautioned, however, that the majority of voters in the province are still undecided.

Alliances Easier Said than Done

¶11. (SBU) ID leaders in both provinces said they were negotiating with Roldos' Ethical and Democratic Network (RED) over possible joint slates of congressional candidates, with some difficulty. In Cotopaxi, the RED/ID base was divided three ways, with realistic prospects only for two of the provinces four congressional seats. Without an accord between at least two factions, Pachakutik would likely pick up an extra seat, probably at the ID's expense. If no accord is reached, the ID would "go it alone," according to ID Cotopaxi leader Byron Burbano. According to ID Chimborazo leader Dr. Diego Torres, Roldos would need 40 RED/ID deputies in the next Congress to govern effectively. No official from any party we met with believed that Rafael Correa would be able to formalize an electoral alliance with Pachakutik, as neither Correa nor Pachakutik's candidate, Luis Macas, is willing to take a back seat.

Ex-President Gutierrez Still Strong

¶12. (SBU) Most in both Chimborazo and Cotopaxi agreed that ex-president Lucio Gutierrez's popularity was still strong in their region, and bolstered by recent visits. Latacunga mayor Maya (PRIAN) claimed that the PRIAN, PRE, and Lucio Gutierrez's party, PSP, would be forming an alliance, and that after what is expected to be a failed attempt to register as a presidential candidate on July 15, Gutierrez would quickly shift his party's support to Noboa. The mayor did not believe Gutierrez comrade in arms Fausto Cobo would be Noboa's running mate. He thought Gutierrez' brother Gilmar, or possibly Gutierrez' estranged wife, would take the VP slot on Noboa's ticket.

Public Outreach Message

¶13. (U) PolChief discussed U.S. foreign policy objectives and successes in Ecuador during radio and print interviews in Riobamba on June 20 and again in Latacunga on June 21. Both PolOffs also delivered speeches at a local high school in Latacunga on June 21. Press coverage was factual. We remarked on the strength of the USG-GOE relationship despite difficulties in the commercial arena. We reaffirmed USG commitment to working with Ecuador to strengthen democratic institutions, including assistance to hold free and fair elections, and security cooperation against common threats.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) Divisions in Ecuador go beyond regions to include ethnicity, religious, and rural/urban splits, in addition to the multiplicity of political party interests normal to competitive democracy. In the indigenous heartland, the cultural and political divide between indigenous provincial leaders and the urban mestizo elite was palpable. With the indigenous forming the vast but fractured majority, Roldos, a mestizo, leads the early polling. Should the Correa-Pachakutik alliance ever be consummated, the electoral balance in these provinces could shift. The congressional

competition is more muddled, with the mechanics of the Roldos-ID alliance still to be resolved. Given the level of fragmentation in these two poor but relatively homogeneous indigenous provinces, it is no surprise that most Ecuadorians worry the next government will have trouble governing.

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